



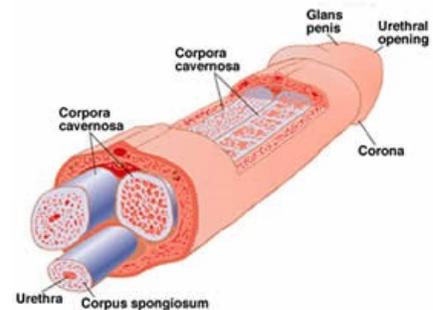
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Erectile Dysfunction

Erectile dysfunction is a common disorder affecting approximately 16% of men between the ages 20-75 and over a third of all men over 70 years old. It is defined as the inability to acquire or maintain an erection sufficient for sexual intercourse.

❖ Physiology of an Erection

An erection occurs when spongy erectile tissues located inside the penis, known as the corpora cavernosa and corpus spongiosum, fill with blood. This generally occurs in response to sexual arousal and/or stimulation. Many systems in the body are needed to achieve an erection. A branch of the nervous system called the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS) plays a large role in the development of an erection. In response to sexual stimulation, the PNS tells the blood vessels in the penis to dilate which allows the erectile tissues to fill with blood.



❖ Causes of Erectile Dysfunction

- Erectile dysfunction can occur for a number of reasons including:
 - Anxiety
 - Depression
 - Low testosterone
 - Blood vessel diseases
 - Prescription medications
 - Pelvic injury
 - Prostate surgery
- Erectile dysfunction can also occur secondary to other diseases such as stroke, back injury, multiple sclerosis or dementia
- Risk factors for the development of erectile dysfunction are varied and include many of the risk factors for heart disease. These include:
 - Obesity
 - Smoking
 - High blood pressure
 - Diabetes
 - Heart disease
 - Low frequency of sexual activity (less than once per week)

❖ Stress

For many men, stress can play a large role in erectile dysfunction. The parasympathetic division of the nervous system is the branch that tells our body to relax. When we're under a lot of stress, this branch becomes overrun by the *sympathetic* division which tells our body to get ready to take action – commonly called the fight or flight response. The sympathetic division of the nervous system also tells the blood vessels in the penis to constrict, which prevents blood from flowing into the spongy erectile tissues. When we're under chronic stress, the sympathetic division is in charge which makes it more difficult for the parasympathetic division to dilate the blood vessels in the penis in order to achieve an erection.

❖ **Blood Vessels**

The control of blood flow is what allows for an erection to take place. Therefore, it makes sense that any process interrupting this process would be a problematic. Chronic stress is just one example that may interfere with this process. Other problems may occur with the blood vessels themselves. If blood vessels become clogged or lose their elasticity, this can decrease the amount of blood that can flow through them. A number of factors such as obesity, smoking, high cholesterol, high blood pressure and diabetes can all adversely affect the health of our blood vessels. Additionally, diet and exercise can also play an important role. Erectile dysfunction may be a sign that there is an underlying blood vessel disease.

❖ **Treatment**

Treatment depends in large part on the underlying cause of ED and is something that your doctor will do his or her best to determine. For stress and anxiety related issues, treatment is going to focus on improving your body's reaction to stress. For problems with the blood vessels, treatment is going to focus on improving the health of the blood vessels as well as improving blood flow. Treatments for both approaches may include various herbal and nutritional supplements or prescription medications. Additionally, a large part of the treatment will focus on diet and lifestyle recommendations. As with any naturopathic protocol, your doctor's recommendations will be personalized to achieve the maximum benefit with the least amount of side effects.

Reference

Cunningham, G. R., & Rosen, R. C. (2012, December 18). Overview of male sexual dysfunction. *UpToDate*. Retrieved from http://www.uptodate.com.ezproxy.ncnm.edu/contents/overview-of-male-sexual-dysfunction?source=search_result&search=erectile+dysfunction&selectedTitle=1%7E150